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LOGISTICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PANHANDLES OF
NORTH VIETNAM AND LAOS

JULY 1969

Project No. 54.5285

25 August 1969

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Logistical Developments in the Panhandles of
North Vietnam and Laos
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Introduction

This is one in a series of monthly reports that assesses the level of Communist logistical activity in the southern part of North Vietnam and in the Panhandle of Laos. All sources are used in the analysis and particular emphasis is given to determining the flow of supplies into and through southern Laos to enemy forces in South Vietnam.

North Vietnam

Logistical activity in the lower panhandle of North Vietnam and on the main access routes into southern Laos remained at a relatively low level during July, reflecting the reduced amount of supplies being moved by the Communists into the Laotian Panhandle where the wet season is in full progress. Aerial photography* indicated only light truck traffic on Routes 15 and 137 which lead to the Mu Gia and Ban Karai Passes, respectively. Traffic on the southernmost logistical corridor (Routes 1036, 1039, and 1032) near the DMZ also was light. Increasingly during the month, the North Vietnamese were observed offloading supply trucks north of the DMZ and using a combination of waterways and trails to move supplies southwest toward Laos; however, the total tonnage being transported by these means probably was small compared to that moved on

* Weather conditions in North Vietnam's Panhandle were slightly improved in July but remained generally poor. A total of 184 Tactical Air reconnaissance flights were flown in July compared with 210 in June and 271 in May.

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the regular truck routes.

Shipping off the coast of North Vietnam declined during July

Photographic coverage of the

southern river ports of Quang Khe and Dong Hoi showed continued low levels of activity. Further north at Vinh, however, coastal shipping activity remained relatively heavy.

photography

showed that substantial repairs were being made to the runway at Vinh airfield. All the craters have been filled and bulldozers, steam shovels, and other equipment were working on the runway. A new POL storage area also is under construction at the airfield. Despite this activity, the North Vietnamese apparently have not placed a particularly high priority on the restoration of this airfield because most of the repairs underway were started soon after the bombing halt in November 1968 and then were abandoned until July.

No new extensions to the petroleum pipeline which runs from the Vinh area in North Vietnam into Laos have been observed, although additional pumping facilities have been added in North Vietnam (bringing the total number of pumping facilities to 35) and an expansion to the POL storage area at Vinh is underway.

Laos

During July, traffic moving into and transiting the Laotian Panhandle continued to be affected by worsened weather conditions and a high level of air attacks. Rainfall during the month was unusually heavy amounting to approximately 36 inches, more than double the amount in July 1968, and 63 percent above the normal mean average for the month. Nevertheless, the estimated tonnage of supplies moved into southern Laos was still about half the monthly average for the 1968-69 dry season (October through May) and was slightly above that brought in during July 1968* (see Appendix A, Table 3).

a. Access Routes

Despite extremely adverse weather conditions the Communists continued to send substantial numbers of trucks south from North Vietnam through the main Passes into the Panhandle. Roadwatch reporting indicated that, although traffic was down, about 12 trucks a day moved south

* The increase in estimated tonnage moved into the Panhandle during July of this year compared with July 1968 results from the use of a heavier load factor for trucks entering or transiting Southern Laos.

Napé Pass

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GULF OF

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Lak Sao

15

101

08

TONKIN

18

Nhommerath

12

101

110

08

Quang Khe

107

NORTH VIETNAM

Mu Gia

Pass

Na Phao

137

01

101

Dong

05

105

DEMARCATION LINE

SOUTH VIETNAM

1

12

128

1281

23

911

91

912

1036

103

01

101

102

Vinh Linh

1

HUE

548

541

16

13

23

92

92

92

92

92

92

924

Ban Bac

923

Saravane

96

964

165

Chavane

16

23

23/16

16

18

110

962

Attopeu

106

05

106

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through Mu Gia during the month. This was well below the 21 a day in June, but about the same as the 1968 wet season average (see Appendix A, Table 4). Roadwatch teams also reported that traffic (4 to 5 trucks a day) continued to move south through Ban Karai Pass.* Some of the inbound traffic may have been moving into storage areas not far from the Border because all sources indicated only very light traffic within the Panhandle. Pilot sightings of traffic on the roads immediately south of both Mu Gia and Ban Karai Passes fell to about 2 trucks a day in July compared to about 13 in June.

trucks on

the same routes fell to minimal levels, e.g., a total of 9 trucks for the entire month on roads south of Mu Gia. On the northernmost access route through Nape Pass (Route 8) pilot sightings indicated practically no traffic and aerial photography showed that the northern portions of the road were falling into disuse. Pilot sightings of trucks on the southernmost access routes near the DMZ also were negligible, although the pilots did report considerable waterborne logistic activity on tributaries of the Se Bang Hieng river just west of the DMZ.

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b. Within the Panhandle

All sources indicate that truck traffic within the Panhandle fell to a low level during July. Pilot reports showed an 85 percent drop in truck sightings compared to June. Total sightings for the month (279 trucks) were the lowest since October 1967, and were less than 10 percent

* The teams are located a considerable distance from the road and probably were unable to count all the traffic moving past them.

of the July 1968 level, although the number of attack sorties was four times the level of a year ago.* The higher sortie rate may have had little relevance to numbers of trucks sighted, however, because of the extremely poor weather conditions which significantly reduced visibility.

For example, about half of the sorties during the month were flown blind, i.e., were directed by radar. [redacted] traffic also was down sharply during July with total detections (434 trucks) amounting to about 10 percent of the June total. In this connection, however, the number of [redacted] in the Panhandle declined from 469 on 1 July

to about 330 by 31 July which may have biased downward the number of detections. Roadwatch teams scattered throughout the Panhandle reported fewer trucks during the month, although the reduction was much less than that indicated by other sources. The daily number of trucks observed by teams amounted to 62, well below the daily average of 110 observed during the past dry season but only about 15 percent less than July 1968 when the weather (and visibility) was much better.

In view of the continued substantial tonnage known to have been moving into Southern Laos during the month, the low level of detected traffic within the Panhandle is difficult to explain. It is possible the enemy has been moving supplies into Laos and building up stockpiles just south of the Passes. This would seem to be an illogical move, however, when the supplies could be kept in North Vietnam safe from air attack. The probability seems greater that supplies have continued to

* See Appendix B for a brief assessment of the results of air attacks on fixed targets in the Laotian Panhandle.

filter south through the system by truck undetected, through increased use of waterways, and by portering.

Although many of the roads have been turned into quagmires as a result of heavy rains and continued intensive bombing, the North Vietnamese have taken extensive measures to keep the logistic system in the Panhandle functioning this rainy season as they did last year. Many road sections have been corduroyed, road banks and fords reinforced, and numerous piles of aggregate have been strategically placed alongside the major roadways.

During the month, trucks were detected by pilots [redacted] mainly in the central part of the Panhandle from the Tchepone area to immediately south of Route 922. Light traffic continued on the main exit routes into South Vietnam. Pilot reports (1 truck a day) [redacted] (3 trucks a day) indicated that small amounts of supplies were being moved on Route 922 into the A Shau Valley. [redacted] indicated light traffic on Route 165/966 east of Chavane and roadwatch teams reported some trucks moving on Route 110.

Of some significance, has been the enemy's increased use of waterways to move supplies this wet season. One of the most important of these water routes is the Se Bang Hieng river which flows in a west-erly direction from the DMZ through the Tchepone area to the Mekong River. Another is the Se Kong River which flows southward from the vicinity of Ban Bac bypassing portions of Routes 92 and 96. Pilot reports of watercraft sightings were up sharply during June and July of this year compared with the same months in 1968. Pilots also have reported increased

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use both of motorized watercraft and "free-floating" of supplies.

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Summary

During July, much heavier than normal Southwest Monsoon rains created

difficulties for the enemy in the operation of his logistic system in Southern Laos. The effects of the adverse weather were compounded by continued air strikes. Nevertheless, the Communists continued to move a substantial quantity of supplies into the Panhandle.

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APPENDIX A

Table 3

Estimated Average Monthly Tonnage of Supplies Moved from
North Vietnam into the Laotian Panhandle over Roads and Trails, a/
October 1967 - July 1969

	<u>1967-68</u>	<u>1968-69 b/ c/</u>
Dry Season, October through May (Daily Average)	5,490 (180)	6,660 (220)
	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969 d/</u>
Wet Season, June through September (Daily Average)	3,080 (100)	-
June	3,990	5,700
July	3,290	3,440
August	2,260	-
September	2,790	-

- a. Estimates are based primarily on reports of roadwatch teams and show tonnages before any deductions for losses. The numbers are rounded to three significant digits.
- b. Based on an average of 3.8 tons per truck.
- c. Because of the probable opening of a POL pipeline in Laos near Route 15 during the first quarter of 1969, the proportions of the total tonnage entering southern Laos consisting of goods other than POL probably increased.
- d. Through July of the current wet season the daily average was 150 tons compared to 120 tons daily during the comparable period of the preceding wet season.

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APPENDIX A

Table 4

Truck Statistics - Laotian Panhandle
Daily Averages

	<u>1969 July</u>	<u>1968 July</u>	<u>1968 Wet Season a/</u>	<u>1968-69 Dry Season b/</u>
<u>Pilot Reports</u>				
Sighted	9	114	65	230
Destroyed	1	13	8	23
Damaged	1	1	1	9
Attack Sorties c/	268	66	64	374
<u>Roadwatch Team Reports</u>				
Number of Trucks Sighted in Panhandle	62	75	75	110
Trucks Southbound through Mu Gia Pass	12	15	13	23
<u>Truck Traffic</u>	14	NA	NA	707 d/

a. June through September, 1968.

b. October 1968 - May 1969.

c. Sorties by US aircraft, including B-52's against all types of targets.

d. Data are for the period 30 October 1968 - 31 May 1969.

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APPENDIX B

Results of Air Attack on Fixed Targets
in the Laotian Panhandle

Predictably, reports of damage to the fixed target system continued to decline during July, primarily as a consequence of the extremely poor weather dominating the Panhandle area. Precipitation for the past month was abnormally high, limiting both enemy logistic activity and allied air attacks and reconnaissance. Reports of damage and the sortie level for July jointly fell approximately twenty percent below the June figures, and were well below the monthly average since last November (see Table below). This downward trend probably will continue through at least September.

In an effort to compound the ~~e~~ffects heavy rains were having on the enemy's logistic system, planes continued to bomb vital road segments, water crossing facilities and transshipment and storage sites. Enemy bunkers and structures were also prime targets during July reflecting efforts to deny the VC/NVA permanent shelter and protection for their troops and supplies.

B-52 attacks against targets within Laos this past month were nearly double the June figure, with more than 9 percent of the sorties hitting enemy storage areas, truck parks, and troop staging areas. Although their ~~e~~ffect is not readily measurable (see Table footnote), a number of attacks caused large multiple secondary explosions indicating probable destruction of substantial munition and fuel stockpiles.

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APPENDIX B

Fixed Targets Destroyed and Damaged by Armed Reconnaissance
Attacks in the Steel Tiger Area of the Laotian Panhandle *

<u>Target</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>June</u>	<u>Monthly Average Since 1 Nov 1968</u>
Road Segments	251	366	594
Truck Parks	76	104	207
Watercrossing Facilities	64	89	79
AAA/Auto. Weapons Sites	18	71	289
Storage Facilities/Military Complexes	243	360	338
Bunkers/Structures	395	334	231
Bivouac Areas	25	23	22
Total	1072	1347	1760
Armed Reconnaissance Sorties	7890	9690	11,100
B-52 Sorties **	410	260	550

* Data compiled from the NMCC Daily Operational Summary and is considered preliminary and subject to revision.

** Results of B-52 attacks are not reflected in the above table. BDA data for B-52 strikes is limited only to reports of resulting secondary explosions and occasional post-strike photography.

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